

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Wallace Teruya**

*"At that time, the restaurant [Kewalo Inn] was busy, Mr. Uehara says to Albert if he had a brother, he's looking for two young persons. So, they called me and my other friend, so two went to work for the Kewalo Inn. I went in the kitchen, saw Mr. Higa, and he was happy. He said to start working tomorrow. I was working first as a busboy. Later, started to learn waiting on the table, learned from Mr. [Steven] Nagamine who later opened his own restaurant, Flamingo Restaurant. Another person, Mr. Makishi, he opened another restaurant. So I learned how to serve the customer and wait on the table from those two persons."*

Wallace Teruya, the second of six children, was born in Honomū, Hawai'i in 1915, to Okinawan immigrants, Ushi and Kame Teruya. His father, a sugarcane field worker and mill worker, later became an independent sugar planter in Ninole where his four younger children were born.

Wallace Teruya spent his childhood on the Big Island, attending public and Japanese-language schools in Hakalau. At the age of fifteen, he joined his brother Albert in Honolulu. He soon found employment as a utility boy at an apartment hotel; later, he was employed as a busboy and waiter at Kewalo Inn.

From 1935 to 1937, Albert and Wallace Teruya owned and operated the T and W Lunchroom in downtown Honolulu. After selling the business to a friend, they opened and ran Times Grill on Kapi'olani Boulevard. The brothers operated Times Grill from 1939 to 1947.

After selling Times Grill, the Teruya brothers researched and worked in the retail trade to open another type of business. Their supermarket business, Times Markets, served island communities from 1949 to 2002.

Retired, Wallace Teruya and his family reside in Honolulu.

Tape Nos. 40-2-1-02 and 40-3-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Wallace Teruya (WT)

Honolulu, O'ahu

June 26, 2002

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) & Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: This is an interview with Wallace Teruya for the Oroku Restaurants Project on June 26, 2002 at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewers are Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

MK: Mr. Teruya.

WT: Yes.

MK: When and where were you born?

WT: I was born in island of Hawai'i, location is Honomū, Hawai'i. Honomū Sugar Plantation.

MK: And what year were you born?

WT: I was born 1915.

MK: Okay. Your parents, Kame and Ushi Teruya, they came from Oroku, yeah?

WT: Okinawa, yeah.

MK: What did you hear about when they came to Hawai'i? What did you hear about their early life?

WT: They came with a group of Okinawa people. Settled in Honomū, and worked in the cane field. My father, fortunately, was selected to work in the sugar mill, so he was happy. I really don't know how many years he worked in the sugar mill. Then, with the group of others, went to Nīnole to lease property to raise their own sugarcane.

MK: So how did that work in Nīnole? How did they grow their own cane and sell it?

WT: They leased the property and raise the sugarcane, and send that to the sugar mill.

WN: So your father started out being a regular worker in the mill at Honomū, and then later he became his own independent cane worker.

WT: Yes. With the group. I think during that period, World War I was going on, so the price of sugar went up. So, I believe that was the reason they moved to Nīnole to lease a

property. About seven or eight families moved—each family leased about twenty acres—and raised the sugarcane and sold the sugarcane to the sugar mill.

MK: And those families that moved from Honomū to Nīnole to do the independent cane, were they all from Oroku, too?

WT: No, (they were Okinawan from different villages).

MK: I was wondering, when your parents first moved from Okinawa to Hawai‘i, what were their plans?

WT: The family told them to work hard in Hawai‘i. At the same time, if they start making money, to send some back home (chuckles). So, they didn’t send too much, but occasionally they send back to their home.

MK: And, your mother, what kind of work did she do when she came to Hawai‘i?

WT: When she came to Hawai‘i, took care the family, cooking. When we moved to Nīnole, four more children was born.

MK: So, in your family, how many children were there?

WT: Six, right? (Chuckles) Let me see. Four boys and two girls.

MK: Which number child are you?

WT: I’m number two, second. My older brother’s Albert; I, Wallace.

WN: Okay. Do you remember the Honomū house?

WT: Yes. Plantation house. There were several houses, we stayed in one of the house. Honomū Sugar Company. And then when we moved to Nīnole, we grew our sugarcane and send the sugarcane to Wailea Sugar Company. That was a new company.

WN: Oh, I see. How old were you when you folks moved from Honomū to Nīnole?

WT: *Chee*, boy. How old I was? (I was about four years old.) When we moved to Nīnole then we started going school. Nīnole School. And then later, going to Hakalau School we go on the bus that was going from Laupāhoehoe to Hilo. So we rode the bus from Nīnole to Hakalau.

MK: What kind of place was Nīnole when you were growing up?

WT: Our homes were about one mile up from the Government Road. Our parents and some other family built a home. How they built a home, I’m not sure. About seven or eight families all together moved to this location and built a home. I guess someone knew a contractor or carpenter to build a home. We stayed there until our family, all (of them) going school.

WN: How many bedrooms did the house have?

WT: Maybe one. Everybody sleep on the floor.

WN: So you had like one living room and one bedroom? Did you sleep on the floor in the bedroom or the main room?

WT: Bedroom. All open anyway. We raise pigs, growing vegetable. So at that time, my father, he had to work hard in the sugarcane field. We also had a horse to plow the sugarcane field. And also, he use the horse just like that was, what you call, our car. Ride the horse and go shopping, go down to the store and shop. The horse was really good. We used the horse to plow the field. And we raise our own vegetables, lots of vegetables.

WN: What kind vegetables?

WT: (Carrots, *daikon*, beans, green onion, sweet potato,) napa cabbage, lettuce. I remember we also planted peanuts, peanut plant. I don't know how we got the seed. The vegetable was growing so well, we thought of sending that to Hilo. But how can we send to Hilo? We don't have the transportation or no connection. To replenish the food supply, my father and some other family members went pig hunting up the mountain to replenish our meat supply. That's how we survived. And still, we have to work in the sugarcane field. *Hō hana*, fertilizer, and when the sugar start getting bigger, we have to *holehole* the dry leaves. Oh, get bitten from the centipede, the yellow bee—terrible. For some of the food supply during certain part of the season, [we picked] mountain apple. Climb up the mountain apple tree, but that was risky because get the bee nest (chuckles).

So, we did lots of work in the sugarcane field even while we go to school. My father say come home as soon as possible, help him in the sugarcane field that we have twenty acres or what. It took about almost two years for the cane to grow for harvesting. And after harvesting, there was a railroad container train, we send the sugarcane on that, and that sugarcane went to the sugar mill for processing. After that, we supposed to get funds for the sugarcane that we sent, but that fund have to pay our charges that we made from the sugar plantation store. So, break even.

(Laughter)

WN: So he only got paid like every two years?

WT: Yeah, something like that.

MK: You know that sugar plantation store, what kinds of things did you folks have to get from the store?

WT: Shoyu, miso, and whatever we need.

WN: Rice, too, yeah?

WT: Oh yeah, rice.

WN: Canned goods, too?

WT: Canned goods, yeah.

MK: So in those days, what kind of meals did you folks have when you were growing up? What kind of foods did you folks eat?

WT: We had soup. I think we had *udon* soup (and chicken with vegetables).

MK: Saimin, *udon*.

WT: So, and going to public school, Ninole School, the school get over 2 [P.M.] or 2:30, then we went to Japanese[-language] school. After Japanese school, my father said come home early, help him in the sugarcane field.

WN: Did your father have other helpers, too?

WT: No.

WN: Just the family.

WT: Each family have their own property.

MK: I know that most of the time you had to help with the sugar. You went to school, then you had to come home to work on the sugar, but when you had some time to play, what did you folks do for play, you and your brothers?

WT: We used to play baseball. We used to make our own ball (chuckles).

WN: How did you make your ball?

WT: With my mother's help. With the, what do they call? The thick cloth.

WN: [WN mishears WT.] And then what, you wrapped the cork around with something?

WT: Yeah.

WN: What did you wrap it with?

MK: So some kind of thick cloth rolled, and your mom helped make it.

WT: I don't know how we got the bat.

MK: So in those days, you make it by yourself then.

WT: Yeah. Cannot go down to Hilo to buy it or shop.

MK: So you folks did baseball.

WN: You said that you folks used to go pick mountain apple. What else was out there besides mountain apple, what kind fruit?

WT: Guava. I think we tried to make jelly, too.

WN: You tried?

(Laughter)

WT: Guava. Honomū there was Ishigo Bakery. About three times a week, the Ishigo Bakery truck used to come. So we have to go down and wait for the truck to buy bread.

MK: So those days you have the plantation store, you have Ishigo Bakery,. . .

WT: Teramoto Store.

WN: How far away was the town with the plantation store, and Ishigo Bakery, how far was it from your house?

WT: Oh, the Ishigo Bakery, that was in Honomū.

WN: Oh, that's pretty far then, yeah?

WT: Yeah. Maybe about three times a week they used to come, the truck used to come Ninole side, they peddling, bakery, so we used to go down wait for the truck to come. Crude beginning. (MK and WN laugh.) No more telephone, no more electric light.

WN: How did your mother cook food at home?

WT: At first, we had to find dry wood. They made stove with the stone, and I don't know how they cooked.

WN: First it was firewood stove.

WT: Dry sugarcane.

WN: Oh, for fuel.

WT: And some wood, look for dry wood. We lease about twenty acres, so part of the acreage was going on the hillside. So we have to look hard for dry guava branches or *lehua* tree branches.

WN: So looking for firewood was one of your chores? So besides firewood and then working in the cane field with your father, what other things did you have to do as your chores around the house?

WT: Not much around the house, mostly on the sugarcane field. Fertilize and *holehole*, dry leaves, get bitten from the bee, bitten from the centipede, terrible. And then when, after I graduated Ninole School I went to Hakalau School. Going to Hakalau School, luckily, there was a bus that came from Laupāhoehoe and going to Hilo. So we rode on that bus going to Hakalau to attend school.

MK: How far was Ninole School from your house?

WT: About two-and-a-half miles, I think. From our house, going down, and going to the Government Road.

MK: Ninole School, how many students in your class?

WT: Not too many, though. After the English school, then go to Japanese school, and then my father used to tell, "As soon as you finish Japanese school, come home." We used to play around, too.

(Laughter)

So to come home as soon as possible to help him.

- MK: When you look back to your small-kid time, what do you remember about Nīnole School?
- WT: I know the principal. The principal at Nīnole School was kind of tough.
- MK: What did you do at Nīnole School?
- WT: *Chee*, what, Nīnole School. Going to the class, our teacher was not Oriental. So I went until seventh grade, I think, and then went to Hakalau School. Luckily, there was a bus going to Hilo, so we rode on the bus to go to Hakalau School. No charge.
- WN: What were your favorite subjects in school?
- WT: I wonder, sugarcane growing or what.
- WN: Did you like your math, arithmetic, or English?
- WT: Arithmetic, whatever they teach. I also went to Hakalau School, and I went to the Smith-Hughes department, that agriculture department. I was thinking to be a farmer, growing banana, papaya. Papaya, I was surprised, there was a small papaya. They call that the Solo papaya. At our house in Nīnole, we were growing papaya tree. The papaya came, ho, big papaya. That's not so good. So when I went to Hakalau School, I went to agriculture school, agriculture department. Learned about the papaya, Solo papaya, growing grapes. Growing grapes had several variety, but the Mainland variety didn't last long. All the leaves were being eaten up by the beetle or some insect, so only the Isabella grapes survived. That's the local grapes. So the Portuguese people, with the Isabella grape, used to make wine.
- WN: So you had your own area to grow the grapes?
- WT: No, the school. They had Mainland grapes, too, but the leaves were so tender, the beetle eat all the leaves, so they didn't survive. We learn about banana, had several varieties of banana. I thought I was going to be a sugarcane farmer. My schoolteacher at Hakalau School was Tsumika Maneki. He specialized in agriculture with Mr. Baron Goto who used to come around, you know [county extension agent] Baron Goto? They were thinking sugar will be number one industry in Hawai'i. That was their thinking.
- MK: So at Hakalau, did you learn about sugar growing, too?
- WT: Yeah. Agriculture school had about two acres of sugarcane field, so we have to take care the sugar, work in the sugar.
- WN: Did your father like that idea of you going into sugarcane farming?
- WT: I don't think so. I don't know. We were really country jacks.
- WN: I was wondering, what did you like better? Did you like Hakalau English School better or did you like Japanese school better?
- WT: English School.
- WN: How come?

WT: Japanese school, until seventh grade I think, I went to Japanese school.

WN: So once you got to Hakalau School, you didn't go to Japanese school anymore?

WT: No, I didn't go.

WN: What was Japanese school like for you?

WT: The schoolteacher, the principal was really good, Mr. Higaki. He was really good. Whenever a student got sick, he used to take care. I don't know how he did. He used to know where to massage.

WN: Oh, I see.

MK: How good was your Japanese?

(Laughter)

WT: Can pass.

MK: In the old days, some people have told us there would be *Tenchōsetsu*, emperor's day celebration.

WT: Yeah, used to have that.

MK: How about in Nīnole? Did you folks get together and celebrate Japanese things?

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

In Nīnole did the workers get together for social things—holidays or celebrations?

WT: Certain holidays we used to get together, I think.

MK: How about like New Year's?

WT: New Year's, oh yeah, with our Okinawa family. Prepare the food, kill the pig, and we used to go from one family to another family, our Oroku family.

MK: In those days, did *Naichi* and *Uchinanchu* mix together a lot or . . . ?

WT: I'm not sure.

MK: But New Year's, the Oroku families visited each other? They went from house to house.

WT: Yeah. Have beer over there.

MK: The fathers (laughs).

WT: Kill pig, chicken. They used to go hunting up the mountain.

WN: Could you tell the difference between wild pig and regular pig?

WT: Yeah, the taste.



WN: What did you like better?

WT: Oh, local one.

MK: How did you folks hunt the pigs in the mountains?

WT: No, had the dog looking for the pig and when they found the pig, the dog would surround, and the members have to have a what you call, sharp knife. Pig hunting, on one occasion about several family, the parents, went pig hunting. About five family, the parents went pig hunting. They caught lots of pigs. [One time] they were coming home, and they found a forest fire alongside the forest. Maybe somehow, they smoke, that might have caused one.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Did you have *Naichi* friends at school?

WT: Oh yeah.

MK: You know, Hakalau School, where did all the kids come from? Some came from Ninole, some came from. . . . Where else did everybody come from for Hakalau School?

WT: Some people came from—what was that? (Hakalau, Chin Chuck Camp.) There was a road going up, and some of our Okinawa people used to come down. And, one part of the area had Gentaro Kaneshiro family [of Columbia Inn]. Where they used to live was a kind of big camp, where the Kaneshiros were living, and there were lots of the Oroku members. It's just different camp.

MK: And Gentaro Kaneshiro is related to Fred Kaneshiro?

WT: (Gentaro Kaneshiro and Fred Kaneshiro are brothers.) One part had the Korean family.

MK: Had Oroku people, the Korean family.

WT: Japanese family.

MK: *Naichi*. How about Portuguese and Hawaiians at Hakalau School?

WT: Portuguese, the school principal of Hakalau School was Mr. Capellas.

WN: Eugene Capellas, yeah?

WT: Oh yeah, I think so. My teacher was Mrs. Tsuna Maneki. The husband was Tsumika Maneki, he was good friend of Mr. Baron Goto.

MK: And Mr. Maneki was your agriculture teacher. So in that agriculture class you learned about bananas, grapes, papayas, sugar. What else did you learn in agriculture?

WT: Mostly about sugar growing. Our class had about two acres, take care two acres.

- MK: So every day when you went to school, how much time did you have to spend on the agriculture part?
- WT: After school, whenever we had time, the group goes to the sugarcane field and *hō hana*.
- MK: And then, at Hakalau School, what other subjects did you like?
- WT: Regular.
- MK: Just regular. Up to what grade did you go at Hakalau School?
- WT: About eighth grade.
- MK: Did you want to go for more schooling after Hakalau or . . . ?
- WT: Yes, I want to, but our parents cannot afford.
- WN: Oh, so to continue into high school you would have had to go to Hilo.
- WT: Yeah.
- WN: That's a big expense, yeah?
- WT: Yeah. You have to go to the boarding school or go take a train ride every day in the morning, afternoon, you know. Cannot afford.
- WN: Did anybody in your family, any of your six brothers and sisters go to Hilo for school?
- WT: No.
- WN: Oh, because they went—that's right.
- WT: All came to Honolulu.
- MK: We know that your older brother Albert, he went to Hakalau School and then he came to Honolulu. Your brother Albert. Tell us how that happened. How come Albert came to Honolulu?
- WT: Luckily my cousin came to visit us, and my mother said, "Take Albert to Honolulu." He was really happy. (WN and MK laugh.) So, we told him to write when I supposed to come to Honolulu. When he came to Honolulu, he was interested in working as a auto mechanic, but when he went to apply for the job, he found a job, but his pants got—clothes got greasy. He was staying with my cousin's family. My cousin's family said he got to find another job. To wash his clothes, you know, greasy.
- MK: And this cousin who came from Honolulu, what was your cousin's name?
- WT: Kame Uehara. That was my mother's nephew. My mother told Kame Uehara, "Take him to Honolulu."
- WN: Do you know why she said that?

WT: We were not happy in staying in Hawai'i, in the cane field. I told my brother to let me know when [I] could come. So, he said he's going to send a letter. But he didn't send a letter.

(Laughter)

He was busy working already.

WN: With Albert and you going to Honolulu, that meant less help in the cane fields. How did they manage?

WT: I think they had difficult times. One day the whole family came over. My mother took the whole family, come to Honolulu.

MK: You know your cousin Kame Uehara, what was he doing in Honolulu?

WT: He was a good chef. He was working at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. And then my brother, Albert wanted to work in the service station, so he said, no, he better go find [another] job. He went looking for job. He found a job at Paradise of Waikiki Café, nice restaurant. He went to apply for a job, any type of job. "No need to pay me." So the owner Mr. Maeda, I think, hired him. He went to work as a dishwasher, peeling potato, onion, or whatever. So he was a good helper in the kitchen, so the chef, Mr. Higa, say, "You come work tomorrow." So they requested Mr. Maeda if they could hire him, no need pay, just feed him. Mr. Maeda said, "Okay. You're hired." It was a nice restaurant. He was a dishwasher, peeling potato, onion, whatever.

WN: And the name of this restaurant was what? Paradise?

WT: Paradise of Waikiki Café.

WN: Where was that?

WT: Corner of Kalākaua and Kapi'olani.

WN: On the *mauka* side?

WT: Yeah.

WN: *Mauka*-Koko Head side.

WT: Kalākaua and Kapi'olani corner. There was a restaurant.

MK: And this Mr. Higa's first name was?

WT: That's a good question. I don't know.

WN: Was he from Oroku, Mr. Higa?

WT: No. He was from Okinawa.

MK: So Albert worked as a kitchen helper and a dishwasher at Paradise of Waikiki Café?

WT: He was a good worker, so Mr. Higa recommended to the boss to hire him. He was hired, and the owner of the restaurant took him to downtown Honolulu to buy white pants, white coat, bow tie, white shoes. So he going be busboy and waiter. That restaurant was a nice restaurant, attracting lots of Caucasian customer from the Mainland or Waikīkī.

WN: What kind of food did they have at that café?

WT: Catering to the Caucasians from the Mainland or Waikīkī.

WN: So American-kind food?

WT: Oh, yeah.

MK: You know, your brother Albert, did he know how to do kitchen work before he went to Honolulu?

WT: No, he didn't know.

MK: So he had to learn how to peel potatoes.

WT: Oh, yeah.

MK: What did Albert think about this kind of work?

WT: He liked the work, better than in the cane field.

(Laughter)

WN: Was he sad that he couldn't do auto-mechanic work?

WT: My cousin's wife say, "Your pants all greasy, hard to wash." So my cousin said, "Go look for another job." That's how he found a job at Paradise of Waikīkī Café.

MK: After Albert started working for Paradise of Waikīkī Café, what did he do after that? He worked over there, they didn't pay him.

WT: No, they paid him later.

MK: They paid him later.

WT: Unfortunately, the restaurant went out of business. It was a nice restaurant, attracting lots of Caucasian customers from the Mainland or whatever, and I guess he went to look for job, looking around, went to Ala Moana Boulevard.

MK: So your brother worked Paradise of Waikīkī Café, and then, did he work for the Kanada's, too? The Kanada's coffee shop in Kaimukī. So, he worked for the Kanada's after the Paradise of Waikīkī Café.

WT: No, before that.

MK: Before that. Tell us about the Kanada's coffee shop?

WT: That was good to get experience. He went to work for Mr. and Mrs. Kanada, and they took good care of him. He stayed there. He learned how to cook, they taught him. And then, Mrs. Kanada took Albert to Waikīkī and then from there she took Albert to Kewalo Basin. There was a restaurant operated by colored neighbor, running the Southern Fried Chicken. But when they went there, there was no Southern Fried Chicken, so they went inside the restaurant, and they saw Mr. Higa, the chef. So, Mr. Higa say, "Albert, you come to work here."

MK: And that was Kewalo Inn?

WT: Yeah.

MK: So Albert, he came to Honolulu, and he worked at the Kanada's coffee shop in Kaimukī, and then later on Mrs. Kanada helped him to go to Kewalo Inn.

WT: Kewalo, looking for the Southern Fried Chicken. She wanted to buy that Southern Fried Chicken, but the colored person who was operating the restaurant went out of business. But anyway, they went inside, venture inside the restaurant, and saw Mr. Higa, the chef. He saw Albert, "Albert, you come to work here. Start tomorrow."

WN: So they thought they would buy Southern Fried Chicken?

WT: Mrs. Kanada went looking for the Southern Fried Chicken operator, but when she went, that Southern Fried Chicken was out of business. So, they ventured into the restaurant, and they saw Mr. Higa. Mr. Higa told Albert, "You come work here tomorrow."

WN: So Mr. Higa had already bought the restaurant?

WT: No, he was working there, he was the chef, Mr. Higa.

MK: And the owner was?

WT: Mr. Uehara. Mr. [Harry] Seigi Uehara.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: And the Kanada's restaurant in Kaimukī, what kind of restaurant was that?

WT: Was a small restaurant serving all kinds of food. It was not that busy because the restaurant was small and the dining room was small. I used to help as a busboy, and later, the restaurant went out of business. So Mrs. Kanada took me to Waikīkī. They found a job for me at the Waikīkī Alohalani Hotel. I met four of our Oroku boys about the same age. They all working at the hotel, helping the chef, and serving breakfast and dinner. The guests was all military personnel. From there . . .

MK: You know the four Oroku boys, who were they? Who were some of the Oroku boys that worked with you at the hotel? Is that when Nagamine-san was there?

WT: No. Uehara, Teruya. . . . Gee, I don't know.

MK: And then, what kind of work did you do at the hotel?

WT: In the morning I help in the kitchen, washing dishes. After the guest left, help clean up the dining room. After that, clean the officer's, navy, room. Washing the pillowcases, small pillowcases, and the large linen was sent out to laundry.

WN: So while you were working at the Alohalani Hotel, Albert was still at the Kanada's working? Then, Albert started working at the Kewalo Inn?

WT: Yeah. Because Kanada's restaurant closed.

MK: So after Albert started working at Kewalo Inn, what happened to you?

WT: At that time, the restaurant was busy, Mr. Uehara says to Albert if he had a brother; he's looking for two young persons. So, they called me and my other friend, so two went to work for the Kewalo Inn. I went in the kitchen, saw Mr. Higa, and he was happy. He said to start working tomorrow. I was working first as a busboy. Later, started to learn waiting on the table, learned from Mr. [Steven] Nagamine who later opened his own restaurant, Flamingo Restaurant. Another person, Mr. Makishi, he opened another restaurant. So, I learned how to serve the customer and wait on the table from those two persons.

MK: In those days, what did Kewalo Inn look like?

WT: Kewalo Inn was a fairly nice restaurant attracting busy people—businessman, fisherman. Early in the morning lots of fishermen used to come have breakfast, then they go out on fishing boats. So later, that restaurant became busy, so Mr. Uehara built a second floor, and that attracted lots of local businessman, legislators, Mainland guests, too. Serving steak, lobster, frog legs, all kinds. I started to be a pretty good waiter.

(Laughter)

I learn from Mr. Nagamine and Mr. Makishi how to wait, serve the customer.

WN: What did they teach you to be a good waiter, what kinds of things?

WT: Teaching, be a busboy, and then to learn from the experience like Mr. Nagamine experience and Mr. Makishi. That's how I started to learn waiting on a table.

MK: So in the early days, how many waiters worked at Kewalo Inn?

WT: Waiters, there were, *chee*, about. . . .

WN: Oh you have a photo of Kewalo Inn.

WT: That's Mr. Uehara.

MK: That's Mr. Uehara, the owner.

WT: Yeah, and Mrs. Uehara. Mr. Gushiken.

MK: Those days, I was wondering about how big was the restaurant? How many people would be inside on a busy day?

WT: On the ground floor, oh, not that big restaurant. So, he built a second floor. But, turnover was fast, so we used to clean up our table, clean off the dishes, set up the table. And then,

he built the second floor, and that attracted more businessman, and [when] legislators [were] in session [they] used to come, and Mainland guests.

MK: In those days, what kinds of entrées was Kewalo Inn known for? What were they known for?

WT: All kinds. Steak, lobster, frog legs, all kinds.

MK: Being a waiter, what things did you like about being a waiter?

WT: Satisfy a customer. More or less, we know if they come during the lunch period, we have to work fast. They have to go back.

MK: They come just for lunchtime and they go back to work.

WT: Maybe they come back again. If they were satisfied with the food, the service, they come back with their family during the dinnertime, or breakfast. So you have to give good service, good food, and then they'll come back.

WN: What was the most popular dish at Kewalo Inn? What did people like the most at Kewalo Inn? Do you remember?

WT: They like all kinds.

MK: And then, when you say "give good service," what did you have to do to give good service?

WT: Smile and welcome, "Good morning," "Good afternoon."

MK: Kewalo Inn, did they have a lot of regulars, repeat customers?

WT: Oh yeah.

WN: I notice the sign here [in the photo of Kewalo Inn], it says, "Italian spaghetti, and Mexican"—I cannot read this underneath—but they had Italian food and Mexican food, too?

WT: Oh yeah.

MK: Those days, who was the main cook at Kewalo Inn?

WT: Mr. Higa.

MK: Mr. Higa was the main cook.

What kind of man was Mr. Uehara?

WT: Mr. Uehara, he was a nice man, but he was really strict.

MK: Why do you say he was strict?

WT: Seeing that the employees were not fooling around, main thing is to do the job that they were hired for.

MK: Nowadays when you go to a restaurant, a lot of waitresses, we have a lot of waitresses at the restaurants, but those days, in the restaurants, was it mostly waiters?

WT: No, mostly ladies, I think.

MK: You had ladies working, too?

WT: Oh yeah.

WN: Do you remember what your pay was in the beginning?

WT: Pay was, *chee*, I'm not sure.

WN: Did you get free meals?

WT: Yeah. Free meal, room and board. So, I was lucky.

MK: So when you worked Kewalo Inn, where did you live?

WT: Where did I live?

MK: Yeah.

WT: Back of the restaurant, on the second floor. I was lucky.

MK: How about Albert?

WT: Albert, oh, he used to go back to where my cousin was.

MK: And then, I notice that people wore uniforms those days. Who took care of your uniform?

WT: Laundry, uniform, I'm not sure.

MK: But you had to wear the white outfit.

WT: Seems like.

WN: You didn't have to do your own laundry?

WT: No.

WN: That's good (laughs).

So when you had your own meals for working there, could you eat anything on the menu or what?

WT: No. The kitchen used to prepare.

MK: Would you get the same food as the customers? Same kind of food or different?

WT: Sometimes different.

MK: And those days, what were your hours like when you worked as a waiter?



- WT: About fourteen hours, but I liked fourteen hours.
- MK: Fourteen hours a day?
- WT: Didn't seem long.
- WN: Wow. Did you go from early in the morning?
- WT: Yeah.
- WN: Wow. So you served all three meals then. You were working when they had breakfast, lunch, dinner.
- WT: Lunch was busy, so you have to rush.
- MK: In between the mealtimes, after breakfast, before lunch, after lunch, before dinner, after dinner, what are you folks doing, the waiters, when it's not the busy times?
- WT: We have to take a short nap.
- MK: Since you folks were at Kewalo Inn right over there by the ocean, did you folks take breaks and go fishing or do anything like that?
- WT: Fishing, not successful. We used to go Ala Moana Park for swimming.
- WN: We forgot to ask you, but you know when you came with your mother to Honolulu, what was that like? Going from country place to the city, you remember what you thought?
- WT: I was surprised. This is a big city. When I came to Honolulu, I came to my cousin's house, and from there I went to where Albert was working, Kaimukī. My cousin told to call Albert that I was in Honolulu. I was kind of scared using the telephone. I never used telephone in Hawai'i. So I called him that I was in Honolulu. I called Koko Head Café, he was there. He said, "Come over." When I went, he asked Mr. and Mrs. Kanada if I can stay with him, so I stayed there.
- WN: So the Kanada coffee shop was known as Koko Head?
- WT: Koko Head Coffee.
- WN: Coffee, I see.
- WT: Small restaurant, but really good business.
- WN: You said that you were worried and scared about using the telephone. Besides telephone, what else about Honolulu made it so different from Big Island?
- WT: Everything. (MK and WN laugh.) Streetcar, you know, used to stop at Kaimukī. At that time, diagonally across from the restaurant, during the evening, the Kaimukī Theatre was really lighted, the front. And the streetcar used to come over there, Kaimukī. At that time, S.H. Kress & Company was being built. I thought of going down to apply, but I hesitated because I was kind of nervous.

END OF SIDE TWO

## TAPE NO. 40-3-1-02; SIDE ONE

- MK: So, at Kewalo Inn, you were a busboy, waiter, and the customers were business workers that came in. Those days, how did Kewalo Inn get customers to come?
- WT: I'm not sure. The good service, good food.
- MK: And then, those days, who were the main competitors of Kewalo Inn? What other restaurants like that were there when you first started working as busboy and waiter?
- WT: Competitors were. . . I'm not sure.
- WN: How did they prepare frog legs?
- WT: We used to keep in one bowl, you know. Hard to prepare. Just like fried chicken.
- WN: Oh, bread it and fry. But, did you folks get the frogs whole or just the legs come to the restaurant?
- WT: No, there was a pond.
- WN: Oh, pond. Wow. You mean by the restaurant?
- WT: Yeah. Later on, the thing was abandoned. Hard to get frog leg.
- WN: Whose job was it to cut the legs?
- WT: The chef's. The restaurant was popular with the lobster.
- WN: Lobster.
- WT: Lobster and steaks and regular—veal cutlet, hamburger steak, stew, rice, spaghetti, all kinds.
- MK: Nowadays, we always leave a tip for the waitress or waiter. How about your time when you were a waiter?
- WT: Yeah, yeah. So, my brother and I start saving and went into, instead of saving in the bank, we went into *tanomoshi* with other members. That's how we save.
- MK: So you saved your tips and your . . .
- WT: Salary.
- MK: Salary, and put it in a *tanomoshi*?
- WT: Yeah.
- MK: And who were the members of your *tanomoshi*?
- WT: Oh, our Oroku members, family.

- MK: Why did you folks decide to save your money?
- WT: Why?
- MK: Yeah. What were you going to do with your money?
- WT: We're thinking of going into business (chuckles).
- MK: What kind of business did you want to start?
- WT: A restaurant business.
- MK: What made you think—how come restaurant?
- WT: We didn't have any other idea what type of job or business to get into.
- MK: What did your parents think about that idea?
- WT: My parents? No, they were not involved.
- MK: How about Mr. Uehara, the Kewalo Inn owner, what did he think about it? Did he know that you folks wanted to start your own business?
- WT: I guess so, because Mr. Nagamine—Steven Nagamine—and Mr. Makishi, later they opened their own business. Nagamine opened a Flamingo Restaurant, Makishi opened Denver Grill. But still, Kewalo Inn was really busy.
- MK: Was Mr. Uehara helpful or encouraging you folks?
- WT: Oh, yeah. I think when I ask for any help, he willingly will give advice. So, we were very fortunate.
- MK: Before we end, I know that Albert worked at Kewalo Inn, but later on he left Kewalo Inn and he went to . . .
- WT: Work for my cousin.
- MK: Yeah.
- WT: Denver Grill in Downtown.
- MK: And your cousin, was he more the businessman or the cook, and what did your cousin do at Denver Grill?
- WT: He was the chef.
- MK: He was the chef. So he owned it and he cooked.
- WT: It was busy, so he called Albert to come down and work with him. Because my cousin, he had some experience at Royal Hawaiian Hotel as a sauce cook. So, Albert went to work for him. And after breakfast and lunch, afternoon was kind of little quiet down, Albert used to go around, roaming around town, going to the library, visiting the legislature if the legislature was in session, or going to the court, or roaming around. He went to King

Street, and he saw a lunchroom for sale, six hundred dollars. That was in a pharmacy, so he went in. He called me, "Hey, I want to buy that soda fountain."

So I said, "Okay."

MK: Your brother, when he worked for your cousin at Denver Grill, what did he do?

WT: Help my cousin, also cook. Afternoon wasn't busy, so he roam around town, visit the library, legislature when in session.

MK: So your brother Albert, he learned how to work in the kitchen then. He knew how to be a kitchen worker, he knew how to cook. And then, you learned how to be busboy and how to wait on the tables. Both of you made a good pair then (WT laughs). You both had the skills.

So you were saying that your brother found the lunchroom at a pharmacy, and he called you up and you folks decided to buy it. What was this lunchroom—soda fountain or lunchroom? What was it?

WT: Soda fountain. On the counter. Sandwich, coffee. Sandwich, I think, fifteen cents, and coffee. The chef was a German lady, one old lady was the chef. So, we worked with her. Came little busy, but since that was in downtown, no after-lunch service. No business Saturday and Sunday. Saturday, we had to clean up, and Sunday we roam around and went to look for location.

We found a location near the *Honolulu Advertiser* [building]. We went to see the person who was running the Springfield tire sale location. So it didn't have any building, just iron roof and under there, selling tire. So we approach him to build a restaurant building. It took long time, it really took long time. Albert, and one of our neighbors, Mr. Lau, Eddie Lau. I went to work for Mr. Uehara, tending the bar part-time. My brother was making kitchen plan, and the carpenters were making the dining room plan. So it took kind of long time. So we opened the restaurant. . . .

MK: Nineteen thirty-nine.

WT: Nineteen thirty-nine.

MK: And what did you name your restaurant?

WT: Times Grill.

MK: How come you folks chose that name, Times Grill?

WT: Short. Short name. So the Oriental customers from Japan can easily remember.

WN: What does that mean, "Times"?

WT: Times?

WN: I mean, whose idea was it to name it Times?

WT: "Time marches on."

(Laughter)

WN: Earlier, the T & W Lunchroom, what does the T and the W stand for?

WT: T stands for Takeo, that's my older brother, and the W stands for Wallace (chuckles).

WN: Takeo is who?

MK: Albert.

WN: Oh, Takeo is Albert.

MK: We were wondering about that name. Why T & W. So, did you folks have enough money to build Times Grill? Seems like that was a big job to make Times Grill.

WT: To build a restaurant? I guess, we had enough money. My brother took care the kitchen, setting up all the stove, and the carpenters took care the front and I also helped plan the front side. So, that's how we got started.

MK: Where did you get your ideas from? How did you figure out how to make the front of the restaurant? The planning and everything.

WT: Visiting different restaurants, how they set up. At least we let the carpenters build the benches. My brother Albert took care the kitchen, the stove, all the other things.

MK: So after you, got Times Grill ready, where did you get your workers?

WT: We call our family and friends, I think.

MK: So you folks called people, your friends and family that you knew.

WT: That's how we got it started.

MK: And what were the hours at Times Grill?

WT: Those days we had lots of energy, so we tried to open twenty-four [hours], but we couldn't.

MK: Oh (laughs).

WT: But later part of the evening starts slowing down, so we close up. So that's how we got started.

MK: Those days, who were your customers at Times Grill?

WT: Our customers came from the *Honolulu Advertiser*, personnel from *Honolulu Advertiser*, and those surrounding that area.

MK: So you got to know a lot of newspaper people then.

WT: Yeah, newspaper people. Later, I worked closely with Kapi'olani Grill, Mr. [Saburo] Teruya from Kapi'olani Grill.

WN: And by that time you were married?

WT: No.

WN: Not yet, later on.

I'm sorry, want to take a break?

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: Mr. Teruya, I wanted to know, at Times Grill, what was the best seller? What did people come to eat at Times Grill?

WT: All types.

MK: All kinds.

WN: We have an old menu here.

WT: All prices listed at or below OPA [Office of Price Administration] code.

WN: Let me see. Oh, "All prices listed are at or below our OPA ceiling prices." Oh, this is just about during the war when OPA was fixing prices. I see things like baked shortribs with Spanish sauce was seventy-five cents. June 3, 1946, maybe right after the war.

MK: In the early days, who were your main customers at Times Grill?

WT: Main customers were lots of people around that area. [WT reads the menu.] "Times Grill, February 25, 1964, special luncheon menu, 11 to 4 PM. Pork steak, teriyaki style. Shrimp and green onion omelet with french fries, dollar twenty-five. Baked macaroni with julienned chicken, boiled ham shank with cabbage. Stuffed avocado with chicken à la supreme. Fresh butterfish with lemon butter. Beef tenderloin cutlet breaded with natural pan gravy. Calf steak and with bacon strip. Grilled round steak smothered with onions, dollar fifteen cents. Dollar five cents, fish and chip with figaro sauce. Italian spaghetti with meat sauce. Hawaiian mixed fruit salad, cottage cheese or sherbet, dollar five cents. Eighty-cent special, soup or mixed fruit. Luncheon meat sandwich with macaroni salad or french fries. Coffee, tea, fruit punch, or orangeade. Roast, dollar forty five. Roast leg of lamb with dressing, mint jelly. Oh, seafood, dollar fifteen to two dollar forty-five. Steak and chops. Pork chop, spring lamb chop, fried or broiled, half island spring chicken." (The owner in 1964 was Mr. Uehara. But, the menu was about the same as 1940s.)

WN: What year is this? Did you say 19. . . .

WT: Nineteen (forty-five).

MK: Sold it in 1947.

WN: [Nineteen] forty-seven.

MK: So you and your brother bought and operated—you folks opened up Times Grill, and then when World War II started, you and Herman went to war, yeah?

WT: Yeah.

MK: So when you folks went to war, how did Albert manage by himself?

WT: Not by himself. My cousin in the kitchen, so somehow he managed.

MK: And your brother Herman, was he ever involved in the restaurant, too?

WT: No. He was working at Aoki Store in Waikīkī. Famous spot. So, he was prepared to open his own grocery store, but we decided—my brother and I—decided to join him to open a supermarket or grocery store.

MK: In 1947, your family sold the Times Grill to Mr. [Harry Seigi] Uehara. How come you folks sold your Times Grill?

WT: Since we are going into grocery store.

MK: You're deciding to go into the grocery business.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: So, we're just saying off tape that because you didn't want to drink too much with customers and look like not that much of future for the children to continue in the restaurant business, you and your brother decided to sell Times Grill. And you folks sold it to Mr. Uehara who returned from internment, the former owner of Kewalo Inn. And then after you folks sold Times Grill, you began working at different places to prepare for your next business.

WT: During the war, my brother Albert was supervising the market. No, supervising the restaurant. His friend told Albert that, "I have a good location at McCully. May be good for market." He bought that property, and that was the beginning of the market business. To get experience or some knowledge about marketing, supermarketing, we went to visit different markets such as Piggly Wiggly, Chun Hoon Market, K.T. Kwai [Meat and Grocery], National Market, and also Central Market. And also places in the country, Wahiawā, and other markets to get some kind of experience.

MK: And then, with that experience, the Teruyas opened Times Market in 1949, that's lasted all the way up to this year, yeah? Times Supermarkets have been in operation under the Teruya family up till this year, (2001, for fifty-two years).

WN: Shall we end here? Okay. We're going to stop here. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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